

Home Heating Oil Tanks - What You Should Know

Health Matters Article for November 9, 2006 (from the Needham Health Department)

If you are a typical homeowner with oil heat, this article will provide you with valuable information about your home heating oil storage tank, and how a heating oil spill can be prevented. The cleanup cost of an oil leak, depending on the extent, and whether it is caught early enough, may cost you thousands of dollars. That is why early maintenance and prevention is key. It is important to be well educated about your current system, here are some questions that you should be able to answer -

- Does your furnace run off of fuel oil?
- Do you know the condition of your fuel delivery line and where it runs?
- Do you have your heating system maintained and oil filter changed annually?
- Is your fuel tank older than your mattress?

If you do not know the answers to all of these questions, it's time to become more familiar with your current system and to set up an annual maintenance contract with your local oil company, if you haven't already.

Here are some important facts about your home heating oil system-

- A full home tank of fuel oil weighs > 2,000 lbs
- A 200-gallon spill can come from a pin-sized hole
- Fuel lines (which run from your fuel oil tank to your furnace) are the most common sources of leaks
- Fuel tank legs are often bent and sometimes missing
- Fuel tanks corrode from the inside due to impurities in oil
- Fuel lines can corrode from contact with concrete (if they happen to be buried in your basement floor, which most of them are)

Do you know if your fuel delivery line is coated with plastic to prevent it from becoming in direct contact with the concrete? It has been shown that fuel delivery lines corrode when in direct contact with concrete for a long period of time. It is a good idea to ask your local oil company to inspect this line at your next annual service appointment and to confirm this. If not, they can replace the line with one that is coated. Another good idea is to get a plastic pan to place under your current oil tank to catch minor leaks. You can also purchase insurance for your oil tank from your local oil company.

If you do have a leak or spill occur, it is critical that you notify your local Fire Department and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). It is also important

that you notify the DEP as soon as a leak has occurred. Here are some reasons why early notification is so important -

- DEP Notice can trigger insurance coverage
- DEP direction can cut costs of cleanup
- DEP can pressure other responsible parties to do the right thing
- DEP can help the homeowner avoid being overwhelmed

To summarize, here are some basic tips -

- Inexpensive Tips
 - Fuel lines can be replaced and coated with a protective sleeve for \$50-\$150
 - Pans to catch minor oil leaks from tanks are only \$100-\$250
 - Yearly inspection is included in annual service fee
- Recommended Upgrades
 - Replace aboveground storage tanks after 20-40 yrs depending on condition (\$500-\$2000)
 - Use double walled tanks if possible
 - Remove underground storage tanks IMMEDIATELY

As soon as you have knowledge of a release of an oil or hazardous materials to the environment, please notify the local Fire Department at (781) 455-7580 and the Emergency Response section at DEP by dialing: (617) 556-1133 (Boston Area) or 1-888-304-1133 (Toll-Free).

For more information on this topic, you can contact the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) waste site cleanup program via their website: <http://www.state.ma.us/dep/bwsc>. Or you can call the DEP Info Line at (617) 338-2255 or, (outside area code 617), call (800) 462-0444 (press 3).

Also, you can check out the following DEP Publications (which you should be able to access on-line):

- Homeowner Oil Spill Cleanup Quick Reference Guide
- Fact Sheets: Fuel Line Spills & Maintenance
- Heating Oil Delivery Lines

Or feel free to contact the Needham Health Department for more information at (781) 455-7523, or check out our web page at: <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/BOH/index.htm>. Remember home fuel tanks and lines are ticking time bombs. Be sure to get yours checked out today!